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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses evaluating and observing teacher performance. It consists of three sections. The first section is an introduction, in which it is stated that most observations are used for the following two purposes: (1) the improvement of instruction, and (2) the provision of information to those who make personnel decisions in a school system. The second section is the major part of the paper. It is in the form of an outline and is a guide containing general descriptive examples of items that might be included in teacher observations. The major headings are (1) "the teaching process," (2) "non teacher-controlled factors which influence the teaching process," and (3) "special strengths of teachers." Subheadings under the teaching process include: "preparation," which lists topics to be discussed with the teacher; "delivery," which lists things to be observed in the classroom; and "observational evaluation," which lists things to be discussed in conference with the teacher. The second major heading includes the subheadings "physical factors," "scheduling," and "extracurricular activities and responsibilities." Each of these subheadings is broken down into items to be evaluated. The last major heading is divided into the subheadings "personal and professional," and each of these is broken down into characteristics to be observed. The last section of the paper is a summary which states that observation is a complex undertaking and many factors must be taken in account. (RC)

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Teacher Observation and Evaluation:

A Working Paper

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Teacher Observation and Evaluation: A Working Paper

Introduction and a Short Philosophy of Observation and Formal Appraisal:

Throughout the nation and across time, public school teachers and administrators have sought to deal efficaciously with the complex issue of teacher performance appraisal through observation. Few school districts have designed observation systems which work to the satisfaction of all. The problem of evaluating teacher performance through observation has been compounded often by the attempt to use such appraisals for two, not necessarily simultaneously-compatible purposes:

1. The improvement of instruction; and,
2. The provision of information to those who make personnel decisions in a school system.

Methods tried in various districts, according to the literature, have done a somewhat adequate job with one or the other of the two purposes. In an effort to formulate a just and valid approach to the observation procedure as it relates to staff of a particular district, and taking into account the need for a democratic process of evaluation of teaching personnel, the following material is offered.

No evaluative method, however enlightened, is able to do a completely successful job for each teacher. It is hoped, though, that with a swing away from the second, traditional, purpose of formal observation to one where emphasis is placed on the first purpose, much of the negativity surrounding formal observation of performance can be minimized.

One of many ways to improve instruction is through evaluation. There are many others, such as the simple supplying and distribution of materials, colleague-sharing of ideas, a sophisticated class of youngsters, to name a few. Outside of these possibilities in the public school setting, however, where the ideal would be realized, we must often settle for "evaluation" as the method: An assessment of <u>where we are</u> in performance, and of <u>where we could be if all conditions were optimal</u>. Self-evaluation

is the beginning and continuous process whereby improvement in performance occurs--not only for teachers, but for administrators as well. Self-evaluation, however, tends to be sometimes astigmatic. Alone, it does not give an adequate nor always reliable picture of the instructional process. Neither does evaluation by an observer present a completely objective analysis. Both are necessary if professionals in education are to work toward the optimum that can be provided for students.

Obviously, evaluation of performance cannot be avoided. It is imperative, though, that the process be one which satisfies both the "observed" and the "observer," and that the observations serve mutually-agreed-upon purposes. To accomplish the best ends, evaluation should be a continuous--formal, or informal--process within each classroom, grade-level, or building. The process between participants should focus upon those items that are thought important to a sound instructional program, and use the best methods--agreed-upon, again, by the participants--to elicit information regarding the items selected for observation.

There have been various attempts in public school districts to categorize teachers as "traditional," "open," "liberal," "structured," etc. It seems more reasonable to analyze and evaluate the teaching process rather than the person, for the teacher must be an active participant in the evaluative process if improvement, if needed, is to be realized. The need, therefore, to leave room for invention, decision-making, and creativity on the part of the teacher and the observer is, consequently, obvious. The fear of being evaluated; fear of competence in the ability to evaluate; and, the doubt of participants in their abilities to evaluate symbiotically must also be considered in the observation process.

The concept of "evaluating" equaling "rating" will die hard. It is hoped that emphasis on the improvement of instruction, and an explicit concern for the morale of participants, will lead to the observational process becoming as much a part of educational daily living as opening the school doors.

Using Evaluation for Improving the Teaching Process:

Each teacher brings to the act of teaching some particular strengths which add immeasurably to the assignment which he/she has been given. These

strengths should be identified as part of the improvement process, and duly credited. The teaching-process proper, though, begins with "preparation." As preparation begins the teaching process, so should it begin the observational process. Since preparation efforts are not always observable in the school setting, they should be discussed in a preliminary conference between the teacher and the observer. The second phase of the teaching process is the presentation of the material prepared. This can be observed in the classroom. The evaluation-component is the third phase of operation, and this should follow readily the observational period. At that point, the observer should note particular strengths of the teacher. As part of that conference too should be the recording of factors outside the teacher's control which may have affected the teaching process.

Not all aspects of teaching, of course, can be covered in such an observational process. With a complex issue--as is represented by: "Is teaching and art or a science?"--it is impossible to measure, or to even observe, in minute or unequivocal terms success or failure in one or another aspect of the teaching process. Handled properly, however, evaluation can be an aid to both teachers and observers in raising the performance levels of both teaching and administrative school personnel.

We move now to a consideration of factors relevant to the teaching process.

General Descriptive Examples of Items that might be included in Teacher Observations:

I. The Teaching Process

A. Preparation: To be discussed with the teacher--

1. Objectives

a. Have meaning for students;
b. Are clear, specific, measurable, and evident to students;
c. Encourage personal as well as classroom goals; and,
d. Are appropriately organized and thoughtfully structured in sequence (as to what precedes and what follows in the conceptual and skill development of a subject).

2. Learning Experiences

a. Present aliments which serve the objectives while being cognizant of the varying skills and ability levels of

the individual student;
b. Consider available resources and utilize time of students productively;
c. Are organized, carefully structured according to preparation, and yet modular in terms of flexibility and imaginative use; and,
d. Encourage student participation, involvement, effort, and therefore the desire to contribute to planning and to seek further exposure to experiences.

3. Content

a. Stimulates inquiry, the development of intellectual curiosity, further investigation by individuals or groups, creativity, and interpersonal regard between students;
b. Is important by virtue of relevance to prepared objectives;
c. Is sequentially valid, and based upon a breadth of teacher knowledge, either professional or personal.

4. Pupil Evaluation

a. Relates directly to objectives and learning experiences;
b. Is used as feedback for modification of preparation, objectives, learning experiences, and content for individual students, groups of students, or the class;
c. Leads to self-evaluation on the part of students; and,
d. In general, provides for diagnosis of student needs and generates prescriptive teaching.

B. Delivery: To be observed in the classroom--

1. Atmosphere for Learning

a. Considers physical factors and limitations;
b. Considers personal needs, morale, self-respect, self-discipline, and individual or collective responsibility;
c. Leads to an understanding of student behavior; teacher is equitable and consistent; shows tolerance for student error;
d. Provides support and encouragement, leading to a respect for the acquisition of knowledge; and,
e. Maintains reasonable control with a minimum of tension, anxiety, fear, and strain; presents balance of freedom and control; complementary relationship between teacher and students.

2. Instructional Methods

a. Excite, intrique, stimulate;
b. Provide appropriate introductions, demonstrations and illustrations, clear and concise lessons, positive incentives;

c. Develop summaries and reinforcements which support the learning experiences;
d. Make use of differentiated assignments, flexible groupings--to meet student needs;
e. Permit deviation from established routine when such will encourage successful learning encounters and activities; and,
f. Provide necessary data for pupil evaluation and feedback.

3. Teaching Materials

a. Are current, organized, authoritative, and aesthetically compiled;
b. Are put to careful and effective use; encourage critical examination and questioning; and,
c. Are put to use by the students.

4. Student Participation

a. Interaction strategies go to and from each student--are not all teacher-directed and controlled;
b. Students' roles are complemented by teacher-direction; students exhibit planning skills, talents, and interests;
c. Encourages exchange of ideas supported and elicited by teacher;
d. Encourages independent thought and activity; develops communication skills through active, not passive, conduct; and,
e. Helps students to direct own learning and assume personal responsibility.

C. Observational Evaluation: To be discussed in conference with teacher--

1. Interpretation of:

a. Progress toward prepared objectives;
b. Problems in procedures;
c. Student and teacher achievement and self-evaluation; and,
d. Other.

2. Translation into:

a. Possible improvement in preparation;
b. Improvement or modification of learning experiences;
c. Improvement in evaluation techniques which lead to an understanding of students' progress levels, abilities, interests, and needs;
d. Modification of attitudes, both teacher and student;
e. Modification of joint teacher-student curricular planning; and,
f. Other.

II. Non-Teacher Controlled Factors which Influence the Teaching Process

A. Physical Factors

1. Light;
2. Ventilation;
3. Temperature;
4. Display Areas;
5. Storage;
6. Noise;
7. Equipment scarcity;
8. Scarcity of teaching materials and supplies;
9. Resource personnel limitations; and,
10. Other.

B. Scheduling

1. Is the student composition of the class "unusual"?
2. Does the teacher have a large percentage of unique student-problems? (Causative factors have to be considered, however.)
3. How many preparations does the teacher have daily? Is the teacher teaching in an area of interest?
4. Does the teacher have adequate time and space to prepare materials in the building? and,
5. Other.

C. Extra-Curricular Activities and Responsibilities

1. Is the teacher attending graduate school with a heavy credit load? (State-mandate? Types and content of courses? Commutation? Marginality effect on professional responsibilities to youngsters?)
2. Does the teacher have excessive demands from the community on his/her time? (School-related?) and,
3. Other.

III. Special Strengths of Teachers--The following personal and professional characteristics of teachers could appear as part of the teaching process, and be mentioned with validity in the observational evaluation conference:

A. Personal

1. In relationships with students and colleagues, the teacher--

a. Respects the opinions of others, while holding to personal convictions and integrity;
b. Exhibits breadth of interest, knowledge, and appreciations;
c. Is self-confident (but not unduly egotistical); practices self-reliance and control;
d. Has a good sense of humor and is adaptable;
e. Is friendly, cheerful, warm, and empathetic;
f. Has dignity and poise;
g. Is sympathetic, patient, courteous, and tactful;

h. Shows good judgment and sincerity, as well as freedom from prejudices;
i. Is conscientious; demonstrates initiative and perseverence;
j. Is efficient and organized (in personally-defined terms), and has the ability to analyze;
k. Is prompt, gives attention to detail, and exhibits responsibility; and,
l. Is original, creative, versatile, imaginative and resourceful.

2. Physical fitness is evidenced by--

a. Vitality; and,
b. Regularity in attendance.

B. Professional

1. Teaching Skills

a. Is capable of planning and has good work habits;
b. Has ability to pursue, and achieve, objectives;
c. Has competence in self-analysis and evaluation;
d. Desires to improve, remedy deficiencies, and seeks aid;
e. Practices effective and clear written expression;
f. Uses standard English (appropriate to environmental circumstances), and converses readily and openly;
g. Enunciates properly for sake of proper interpretation;
h. Exhibits knowledge of subject matter under consideration, or seeks to improve same;
i. Keeps current through wide reading of professional journals;
j. Is knowledgeable of current affairs and their implications for youth;
k. Shows ability to learn and increase personal cognitive repertoire;
l. Has an appreciation of fine arts, or displays interest in aesthetic appeal, as opposed to mechanical, to children;
m. Fosters critical thinking through unbiased or dictatorial approaches to duties and subject-matter; and,
n. Exhibits concern and respect for students as school-system clients/consumers.

2. Attitude

a. Recognizes that the primary responsibility is that of educating and training students;
b. Accepts a reasonable and fair share of work with extra-curricular activities;
c. Meets responsibilities for equipment and materials assigned;
d. Supports the total school program;
e. Is cooperative with colleagues, parents, and administration;

f. Assumes responsibility for own words and actions; and,
g. Respects personal relationships in frank discussions of school-related problems.

3. Preparation and Growth

a. Has the necessary background and subject-matter preparation for the grade level taught;
b. Is willing to try new methods in teaching; exhibits openness to change possibilities; and,
c. Continues professional training (in some manner).

4. Community Relations

a. Has an understanding of the social, cultural, and intellectual needs of the community at large;
b. Is able to work and communicate positively--without hypocrisy--with members of the community, especially those community members who are parents of children being taught;
c. Recognizes the responsibility to inform parents of each child's progress in school, without bias or undue condemnation because of personal value structure;
d. Conducts all parent conferences with understanding and appropriate preparation (including special effort if requested by parent);
e. Makes parents feel welcome when they seek understanding of the school or classroom program and its relationship to their children; and,
f. Is willing to represent the school to visitors.

Summary:

In essence, it has been said that observation of the teaching act is a complex undertaking. Such observations should focus upon both the roles of the "observed" and the "observer," and place special emphases on "preparation," "delivery," and "evaluative" techniques utilized by the teacher. To teach well in today's public schools it would appear that one would have to exhibit "renaissance" characteristics, training, and approaches. Not so, but at least a modicum of personal dedication and professional currency can be expected by student/clients and taxpayer/parents and public. Consequently, teacher talents and specializations, skills and attitudes, should be recognized as they contribute to, or detract from, positive teaching acts.